

MESOPOTAMIAN MINUTE

- *Current News on Agriculture & USDA in Iraq* -

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Al-Mishkhab Rice Research Station (MRRS) Rice Project, Najaf– Iraq rice farmers cultivate rice according to farming practices inherited from their parents, which by current agricultural standards use inordinate amounts of seed and water. The project provides training on the System of Rice Intensification (SRI) methodology for increasing the productivity of irrigated rice by changing the management of plants, soil, water and nutrients. SRI, which originated in Madagascar, leads to healthier soil and plants supported by greater root growth and the nurturing of soil microbial abundance and diversity. The project introduces a high yield rice variety

(Jasmine) and serves to strengthen and help diversify the economy of the Province through the introduction of contemporary farming technology and practices. SRI involves:

- careful planting of young seedlings (8-12 days old) singly and with a wide spacing (25 cm or more)
- keeping the soil moist but well-drained and well-aerated
- Adding compost or other organic material to the soil as much as possible; use of the organic material provides an added benefit of reducing soil and water salinity.

The benefits of SRI, which have been demonstrated in over 40 countries), include: increased yield (50-100% or more), a reduction in seed requirements (up to 90%) and water savings (50% or more). Many SRI users also report a reduction in pests, diseases, grain shattering, unfilled grains and lodging. Additional benefits stem from the reduction of agricultural chemicals, water use and methane emissions. Russell Williams, USDA Agricultural Advisor PRT Najaf.



Kirkuk Silo – USDA Agricultural Advisors Dr. Bill Tierney and George Stickels recently toured the Iraqi Ministry of Trade Grain Storage facility in Kirkuk Province. The facility has been renovated over the last 18 months in a program coordinated by the Provincial Reconstruction Team. Funding for the renovation was accomplished through the monetization of a CERP funded emergency feed grain program and a cost share arrangement with the Ministry of Trade. The Kirkuk elevator receives both domestic wheat production and imported wheat for blending and distribution to private sector flour mills.

Personnel Update - There are currently 20 USDA personnel in Iraq including those with Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), at Embassy Baghdad or embedded with U.S. military units. With this issue we say good bye to John Ellerman who did a rock solid job as Ag Advisor to PRT Baghdad.

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